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HANDS

I like to think how wise God was when making man
Cunningly to devise what raises him a span
Above the four-foot beast. His hands are subtle things:
There 's wonder in the least of them. Claws, paws or wings
Are good but lack God's sign, His own creative skill
That lurks in fingers fine, answering to the will
And thought of him who sits, guiding his servants ten,
Obedient to his wits with tool or brush or pen.

The dearest of them all are babies' hands like flowers,
So pink and curled and small, yet with a strength like ours,
Learning to clutch and hold and serve the eager mind.
Good too a hand that 's old, wrinkled and worn and kind,
Seamed with its honoured age: the labourer's, grimed with toil,
His palm a printed page to show it tilled the soil,
Used mattock, plough and spade, felled timber, tamed the earth,
Sowed seed, reaped sheaves, obeyed him willingly since birth.

How subtle and how wise the strong, fine hands of art;
A genius in them lies to stir and lift the heart:
In string and wood they wake the hidden melodies.
In carven stone they make great spires against the skies,
Lift Beauty from the sod and bring Olympus down,
White goddess, bronzèd god to dwell with churl and clown,
Catch angels by the sleeve: with palette, brush and paint
Make faithless souls believe in seraph and in saint.

But of all hands the best to me are yours, dear love,
I 've watched them lie at rest, careless of sheltering glove,
And praised them that they were the slaves of your true mind,
So strong, so swift to care for weak and sad; so kind,
There 's healing in their touch and gracious charity
Lies in your handclasp. Such their gentleness to me
That I would ask but this, death being overcome,
Your hands to clasp my own, your hands to lead me home.

WINIFRED M. LETTS.

Dalriada, Blackrock, Ireland.